

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE
V I S I T A T I O N
OF THE
Rev. ARCHDEACON CHOLWELL,
AT
H U N T I N G D O N,
M A Y 19. 1772.

By PETER PECKARD, A.M.

Published by desire of the ARCHDEACON, and *many* of the Clergy.

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S. E. K. M. O. N.

RESERVED AT THE

V I S I T A T I O N

OF THE

REV. ARCHDEACON CHOLWELL

AT

M U N I C I P A L



BY PETER RICHARD A.M.

Published by order of the Archdeacon, and sent to the Clerk.

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TO THE
Rev. ARCHDEACON CHOLWELL,

THE FOLLOWING
DISCOURSE,
PUBLISHED AT HIS REQUEST,

IS
MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT

THE AUTHOR.

TO THE

REV. ARTHUR CHURCHILL

THE

DISCOURAGE

FORWARDED AT HIS REQUEST



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NEW YORK

THE AUTHOR

R O M A N S IX. 28.

HE WILL FINISH THE WORK, AND CUT IT SHORT IN RIGHTE-
OUSNESS: BECAUSE A SHORT WORK WILL THE LORD
MAKE UPON THE EARTH.

IT must be confessed, that this passage is attended with some degree of obscurity. Indeed, this objection has been made to the whole epistle to the Romans; but yet without sufficient reason. Since the difficulties complained of arise, not from any real obscurity in the Author; but from the prejudices of Commentators, by their endeavours to adapt St. Paul's expressions to Ideas unknown in his time, and to explain his meaning by the dark sophisms of scholastic Divinity.

The rights and privileges of the Jews founded upon the promise to Abraham, their nature and their extent, the forfeiture of these privileges, and the consequent rejection of the Jews, the reception of the Gentiles into their place, and the Justice of God in these several dispensations, with preceptive admonitions to Christian duties, are the principal subjects of this Epistle.

In the chapter from which the text is taken, is particularly vindicated the justice of God in the rejection of the Jews, and reception of the Gentiles. And in the course of this argument, St. Paul shews, that this procedure is agreeable to Reason, and to former dispensations; producing to this purpose, amongst other proofs, the authority of Isaiah, delivered in these

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terms:

terms: *The consumption decreed shall overflow in righteousness, for the Lord God of Hosts shall make a consumption, even determined in the midst of all the land:* or, as it stands in the text, *He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness, because a short work will the Lord make in the earth.*† The former is the translation of the Hebrew; the latter of the Septuagint. There is difficulty in both; and a very judicious Commentator ‡ observes upon these passages, that he has not been able to gain any clear satisfactory notion of the sense of either. But as it is our duty to investigate the Truth, how defective soever our endeavours may be, I therefore hope it will not be thought presumptive in me, if I offer to your consideration,

I. An Enquiry into the true meaning of the Text.

II. Some Observations on the important Doctrine implied in it.

St. Paul had shewn, by the instances of Ishmael and Esau, that the Elder, the First-born, had been rejected, and the younger chosen in his stead to answer the divine purposes. Consequently, that it is consistent with the method of God's former proceedings, that the Gentiles, considered in this epistle as the youngest born, when compared with the Jews, should be received into the place of the Jews, the first-born, who had rejected the terms of Grace offered in the Gospel. That this proceeding cannot be called unjust, where Dominion is on one part absolute, and on the other there are not any circumstances to be pleaded to restrain it; because the potter hath full power over the clay to form one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour, without assigning any reason for this determination. That in the present case, however, a sufficient reason may be found for this procedure, distinct from the consideration of God's absolute

† Rom. ix. 28. ‡ Dr. Taylor.

lute authority, alluded to in the instance of the potter over his clay. For here had been a covenant, and conditions stipulated: these conditions had been broken, and the covenant of course dissolved.

At the dissolution of this compact God is said to be *λογον συντελών και συντεμνων*, which is translated, *he will finish the work, and cut it short*; and *λογον συντέμνημενον* is rendered, *a short work*. Now the word *λογος*, as every one knows, has many different significations; some indeed intirely peculiar to the writers in the New Testament: and others in common with other Greek authors. It frequently signifies an *Account*, or a *Reckoning*, as well as a *Work*. And if in the Text it were translated by the former, instead of the latter expression, St. Paul's argument would remain equally pertinent, and be freed from all obscurity, even of expression.

The next enquiry then is, whether the text will bear this construction.

In the first place, the direct sense of *τελεω*, is simply to end, or finish a thing; and *συντελεω* may signify to end or finish a thing or business, in which another party is concerned. The same observation will hold good, with respect to *συντεμνων* and *συντέμνημενον*; and these expressions are as intelligible, applied to an account or reckoning, as to any other species of operation: *λογος* also is translated by Pastor into German, directly by the word *Reckoning*; and in many places of the new Testament, it is actually received in this signification; *αποδος τον λογον της οικονομιας*, *give an account of thy stewardship*;* *αποδοσκειν υπερ αυτου λογον*, *they shall give an account thereof*; † *εν λογω δωσεως και ληψεως*, *as concerning, or in the account of what has been given and received*; ‡ *συναρει μετ' αυτων λογον*, *he reckons with them*; || *ος ηβηλησε συναραι λογον*, *who would take account of his servants*. § Our Trans-

* Luke xvi. 2.
§ Matt. xviii. 23.

† Matt. xii. 36.

‡ Phil. iv. 15.

|| Matt. xxv. 19.

Translators also in another passage even of this epistle to the Romans, translate the word λογος by the word Account; *εκαστος ημων περι εαυτου λογον δωσει τω Θεω, every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.** If this may be thought sufficient authority for the proposed alteration, the sense of the whole passage will be to this effect. God has long forbore with the Jews, who reject all the dispensations of his mercy, even the terms of the Gospel. The time is therefore come, when he will no longer continue these gracious offers; he will no longer continue his particular connection; but will at last, state and settle his accounts with them, and will offer to the Gentiles the terms of the Gospel Covenant: with the Jews he will therefore finish his account, and cut it short in righteousness; for a short or determined account he will make with them.

If this sense of the Text may be admitted, it leads us to a very important conclusion with regard to the divine Dispensations; and seems to prove in God's religious institutions, a judicial Resumption of the divine Favours, if not applied to the purposes for which they were intended. I will therefore now beg your permission to lay before you some observations resulting from this important doctrine; which I hope will not be thought foreign, either to the present circumstances of the times, or the present occasion.

That the divine Dispensations should be in this manner conducted, is agreeable to reason, and every equitable consideration. For he who refuses to apply any benefit according to the Intention of the benefactor; and a fortiori, he who perverts it to contrary purposes, no longer deserves the continuance of this favour. This mode of proceeding is adopted by human Legislators, in the necessary sanctions of their institutions. It is a measure, not only consistent with reason, but indeed every where necessary for the general Good, That the disobedient

* Rom. xiv. 12.

dient should be deprived of the advantages of Obedience, and lose the Protection of that Government, against which they deliberately rebel.

This measure of Polity being extended to God's Moral Dispensations, we must conclude, That all they, who counteract the design of his Institutions, will certainly some time lose his protection, and be rejected by him. So that in this view, the rejection of the Jews was not only Judicial, but may be considered also as Exemplary; as intended to be admonitory to all those, who in after times should receive peculiar marks of God's favour.

The plain deductions of reason on this point, are well supported by the invariable authority of Scripture, and by facts of uncontroverted history. Let us go back even to the earliest time, to the expostulation with Cain; *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? if not, sin lieth at thy door:* this is founded on the same rule of government. Throughout the whole Jewish Institution, under all their varied situations of Prosperity or Distress, we find this doctrine still unvaried, That the Performance of God's will should ever claim his future Protection, and Disobedience ever be attended with a judicial re-sumption of the Divine Favour.

From this principle, is derived that pathetic Expostulation in Isaiah concerning the *Cultivation* of the Vineyard. *What could have been done more, that I have not done in it? — still it produced wild grapes. — I will therefore take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up.*

This is also a fundamental Principle in our Saviour's Institution, and as it were the Corner-stone of his Gospel. It is most emphatically pointed, in the parable of the Talents; and is expressed or understood in all the passages, relative to God's Government of the World. The disciples and apostles
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all invariably teach such a providential interposition in human affairs, as of necessity implies the doctrine here maintained; namely, That a Resumption of the divine Protection will attend the Non-proficiency, or neglect of Improvement under the means of Grace.

These arguments from reason and the authority of the Scripture, are also in fact fully exemplified in the history of the whole world. Whoever seriously considers the annals of mankind in this view, will find abundant matter of Instruction, and sufficient Conviction of the constant interposition of God. While he perceives infant states, according to their knowledge and their opportunities, practising and promoting virtue, ever prosperous in their undertakings; and rising still in opposition to superior strength, contrary to all rules of human calculation with respect to the probable events of secondary causes. The same again when grown to maturity, and possessed of all worldly Blessings; but grown also insensible of the protection of Heaven, and careless of farther Improvement; then becoming gradually the victim of their own vices, or perhaps feeling the scourge of some more distinguished interposition. Thus either sinking into oblivion, or, if a full end is not made, reduced to public desolation; and their Ruins preserved, as a sacred memento to the world, in a condition of perpetual Infamy.

The present state of that people, who first gave occasion to the denunciation in the text, is a full proof of what is here said. They are acknowledged to be in all considerations a Peculiar people. Their Institution was properly speaking a Theocracy. Their Laws consequently of Divine Authority. But in process of time, Human Inventions crept in amongst them, and the Decisions of men became superior to the Ordinances of God. The consequences of this defection were repeat-

repeatedly foretold, and the Resumption of God's favour, with all its attendant miseries, was distinctly denounced against them. Many marks of their approaching ruin from time to time were given, as presages of the absolute completion of these denunciations. But nothing could awaken them from their amazing Lethargy, no warnings could alarm them to a proper sense of their impending destruction. They still rebelliously adhered to Human Decisions, in opposition to the divine Commands; and at last, made the word of God of none effect, through their Traditions. The dreadful consequences are still visible; they still stand forth to the world under the circumstances of a judicial condemnation, under circumstances which cannot reasonably be accounted for any other way: and in these circumstances will remain, till the divine purposes in their punishment shall be accomplished.

These things that happened unto them afore-time, are unto us for ensamples; and are for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. They were God's chosen people; nevertheless, they were rejected; and we are taken into their place. Nay; we are raised to higher degrees of the divine favour. For the Revelations of God's purposes to them, were Partial and Obscure; darkly represented by mysterious symbols, or concealed beneath the veil of prophecy. But on us, are bestowed the full and final manifestations of the divine will; on us hath been permitted to shine the clear and glorious light of the Gospel. They could discern the gracious purposes of God but through a glass, darkly; we behold them, as it were Face to Face.

Yet over the brightest Light that God could bestow, or man receive, at an unhappy time, as in the case of the Jews, crept the thick mist of human Inventions. The black clouds of Philosophy, falsely so called, soon concealed in worse than Ægyptian

gyptian darkness, the pure light and ingenuous simplicity of the Gospel.

They, who first became members of the Church of Christ found it a glorious Church; not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; free from all imperfections, and containing nothing but simplicity and truth. But this happy state of things did not long continue: the Pride of the Philosopher soon became offended with the unornamented Doctrines of the Carpenter's Son. Then, through an abuse of the intellectual powers, abstruse reasonings on subjects of a transcendental nature; then Mysteries, profound and unintelligible, were substituted in stead of the plain Truths of Revelation. The world was soon bewildered in a Maze of Metaphysics; and the vulgar being blinded by grosser prejudices, the learned equally so by elaborate refinements, both soon lost sight of true Religion.

It would be superfluous to lay before this audience, the peculiar institution of the great School at Alexandria;* in which was taught, what was called the Eclectic Philosophy. A wild, and an impossible plan! However, the fundamental tenets of Plato were retained in this society, and made the ground-work of all their doctrines relative to the Supreme Being; and to the nature and constitution of Man.

Now the first men of literary abilities who embraced Christianity, here received their education: here were they tinctured, and that too very strongly, with the principles of Platonism; and it is past all doubt, that they brought too great a portion of their philosophical prejudices into the Christian Church.

It may also with truth be asserted, that Plato,† thus introduced

* For an account of which, see note (a) at the end.

† Ex fuforum exercituum reliquiis, eorumque ducibus, mirum quam exitiosum bellum in Ecclesia Dei natum est. E quorum numero illi sunt magni duces, Zoroastri, Mercurii, Socrates, Platones, Aristoteles, Procli, Plotini, &c. &c. Unum in præsentia Platonem ante oculos ponam. Atque utinam de quo tantum

duced, has been in fact, the greatest enemy to Christ; that in proportion as the doctrines of this great Philosopher have been received, those of our Saviour have been defaced and obscured. That it is chiefly through his wisdom, that the world knows not God: chiefly from his vineyard have been transplanted those wild grapes, that disgrace the vineyard of the Gospel. For in the course of time, as circumstances gave convenient opportunity, one prejudice, and one corruption, introduced another; till at last, from these materials, was erected the enormous fabric of Papal Tyranny. At the Reformation, indeed, this Babel of Corruptions, and human Arrogance, was thrown down. But it may be said without offence, that the Rubbish attending its fall, was not cleared away so thoroughly as might be wished. Nor indeed, could this be reasonably expected; as will appear from a short view of the state of Learning and Religion in that age, which immediately preceded the Reformation.

The study of Theology had long lain under great disadvantages. A vile subjection to opinions received without examination, every where prevailed. A wretched, though formal Sophistry, was every where held in higher estimation, than fair and candid argument. Thus was Christianity racked and distorted into a thousand unnatural shapes, to be adapted to

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tum quererer non haberem. Hic enim, humaniter, et plus quam par erat, a nostris benignè susceptus — ut sive de Deo, et de ipsius una quadam nescio qua trinitate, sive de Dæmonibus, sive de Anima sermonem habuerit, ad sublimem Græcæ sapientiæ metam pervenisse videretur. Hinc nostri prima mali labes. Hinc superstitionum, mendaciorum, et pravitatum omne genus in Eccl. Dei agmine factò cœpit irruere. — Utinam Christianorum plerique Platonem, tanquam Mosem Atticum, non venerarentur. Hoccine est, quæso, Sac. Scripturam interpretari? hoccine de Veritate, de Ecclesia, de Christo bene mereri? Hos ego Philosophos existimem? hos ego Christianos? hos Homines? qui Veritatem, qui Religionem, qui propriam Rationis libertatem, unius hominis verbis, unius Platonis figmentis, *teretismatis*, somniis addixerint?

Joh. Baptista Crispus de Platone cautè legendo, in Præf.

the Scholastic Jargon of ignorant and infatuated Monks, or be made subservient to the scandalous purposes of a worldly Tyrant. True Criticism had not yet made any considerable advances. The more polished, if less useful accomplishments of Classical Learning, except some extraordinary instances, were unknown. Philosophy also was still confined in the bands of Ignorance and Error. Popery, taking advantage of these circumstances, industriously spread her dark veil over all the Countries subjected to her Tyranny; and the knowledge of Christianity, with every other valuable science, was well nigh extinguished.

And now, when from the state of things, a Reformation was become absolutely necessary; when from a happy coincidence of many circumstances proper to promote it, the most hopeful expectations might have been encouraged; even in the dawn of this long-wished, this much wanted Reformation, as in the early times of Christianity, a false Philosophy was the bane of true Religion. Aristotle had long been in possession of the European Seminaries of Learning. But lately some learned Men from Asia had brought into Europe the bewitching Philosophy of the too amiable Plato. This produced a contention amongst Christian Divines, whether the subtle Sophistry of the one, or the sublime speculations of the other, should hold the highest rank in the School of Christ. At last, a sort of Compromise was made between the contending parties, (not unlike the former scheme of the Alexandrian Eclectics) to take what was best liked from these jarring systems, and adapt the Doctrines to be established to this strange mixture, as well as they were able. And now the Contest was, not whether the Sophistry of Aristotle, or the enthusiastic raptures of Plato, could be best maintained; but how this new system of contradictory principles should be placed and supported in the seat of Christian

tian Instruction. As if Light, by some inconceivable operation, could be extracted from Darkneſs; or the Divine Truths of Chriſtianity from the lying Vanities of Ariſtotelian, Platonic, or Eclectic Wiſdom. But with regard to this Coalition, a very reſpectable author makes the following remark: “ Theſe reconciling Platonists were chargeable with many errors; they fell into the moſt childiſh ſuperſtitious, and followed without either reflexion or reſtraint, the extravagant dictates of their wanton imaginations.” *

In ſuch circumſtances as theſe, a Religious Reformation could not have proceeded ſo far as it did, but by the peculiar protection and providence of God. But from theſe circumſtances, we may reaſonably conclude, that though our great Reformers ſaw and amended many things that were wrong; yet that they could not at once and intuitively ſee and eſtabliſh every thing that was right. They merit our eternal gratitude for what they did: and we in purſuance of their glorious example, ought to finiſh what they left undone. The whole buſineſs of Religion before their time, was an arbitrary and imperious eſtabliſhment of Human Corruptions, in open oppoſition to the word of God; and in direct contradiction to the common ſenſe of man. Inveterate prejudices excited by blind Superſtition, and Paſſions enflamed by a Spirit of Perſecution, ſeemed to have fixed theſe abominations in a perpetual Dominion. Yet the word of God was by degrees liſtened to, and prevailed: the Scriptures were ſtudied; and in proportion as they were underſtood, the uſe of Reaſon, and the bleſſing of Liberty, were reſtored to mankind.

But it is to be lamented, that even our great Reformers, in ſome inſtances, did not keep their conduct conſiſtent with their principles. The Liberty of Private Judgment, that Natural Right of Man, was the grand foundation, and the great argu-

* Moſh. V. I. p. 769. Q^o.

ment for the Equity of the Reformation. This they pretended to maintain, as a Fundamental Principle: but yet, when their own opinions had once been systematically established, they departed from this righteous principle, and from candour and benevolence which becomes a Christian; persecuting in some cases, with unrelenting fury, those persons who differed from them in opinion. If this was to allow the *exercise*, it prevented the *Utility* of private Judgment, and made the exercise vain and of none effect. This was indeed to permit the Husbandman to toil and cultivate the ground, but to rob him of the fruit in their season.

If then we take an impartial view of this important æra, and make proper allowances for those disadvantageous circumstances, under which our great Reformers undertook their work; if we consider, that they were entirely unacquainted with many advances in knowledge, which have been gradually made since their time; and were unfurnished with many means of Information, which we have long enjoyed; it is not to be expected, that they should at once spring from their Ignorance, and learn every thing: and on the contrary, that all the great men of succeeding generations, with all their increasing opportunities of improvement, should not be able to discover any thing that had escaped the search of their predecessors. Had it been the inclination, it was not in the power of these so thoroughly to clear the field, but that great gleanings would be left to those who followed them. But whatever might be in their power, we learn from very good authority, that it really was not in their inclination. For, "that they had used a prudential caution, and did not at once disclose even all that they knew, out of regard to the circumstances of the times, and the dispositions of the hearers. That observing the general prejudice against the Reformation, they thought it advisable

able to yield a little to that general madness; and so win the hearts of men by moderation, without frightening them at first with the true notion of some important doctrines, which at a proper opportunity they intended more fully to explain. Let therefore," says this valuable author, who was a witness of the confusions attending the Reformation, "Let Peter, continue to be Peter, and Martin, Martin, that is, men capable of being mistaken; but let the Spirit of God be received by the means of such instruments as he shall stir up; whether Paul, or Zuinglius, Oecolampadius, or any other of less authority. Those persons lived in an unhappy time; and were more busied in removing the Filth of Popery, than in the introduction of the pure Truth. They had so much employment in refuting calumnies, that they had but little opportunity to study the Christian Doctrine revealed in the word of God. But now that God has disclosed to us so many bright rays of his Truth, we ought not any longer to pay regard only to that Light, which proceeded from Thunder."* And it cannot be supposed, that in the course of near 300 years, in times of Liberty and free Enquiry, when Religion, Learning, and Philosophy, like the three sisters of Poetic Antiquity, have gone hand in hand together; when they have been ardently pursued by men of exalted Genius, and honest intention; it cannot, I say, be supposed, that this pursuit should have been entirely without effect.

As our great Reformers drew up their respective systems, the opinions, — may I be permitted to say? — the errors of the Times were established with them. But as Truth and Science advance to meet us, we ought to receive them with open arms, and accept their assistance. We have an infallible Criterion for the discovery of Truth, which, like Ithuriel's Spear, will at the same time expose the Deformity of Error:

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* Letter of Ant. Coranus — Brandt Hist. of Reform. B. VIII.

A standard in every body's hands, by which we can exactly measure, and by which we ought to try the Rectitude or Obliquity of all our Religious Persuasions. For an opinion is not therefore true, because it is part of an established System; but because it is consistent with unprejudiced reason, and the plain doctrine of the Scripture.

Let it not be considered from what is here said, that I wish to overturn Establishments, or even to remove from them the security of a proper Test. On the contrary, a Rational Establishment seems the most likely method, not only to prevent confusion, but to promote, what of all things is most to be desired, Christian Charity. For in such an one, (as the Christian institution was intended for universal acceptance, for the mean and the ignorant, as well as for the mighty and the learned) it must be presumed, that nothing can be admitted of abstruse and difficult speculation; nothing but what is clear and intelligible, and evidently supported by the express authority of Scripture. Because Scripture, it is generally agreed, is sufficiently explicit in all things necessary to Salvation: but if any thing be made part of an Establishment, which is not intelligible, nor agreeable to the plain and easy parts of Scripture, it must be considered as being unnecessary: and indeed, not only unnecessary, but prejudicial; as opening the way to uncharitable dissension. For Men may dispute for ever concerning Points of Speculation, or Matters they do not understand; but concerning that which is evident, there cannot be any dispute or disagreement.

A wild interpretation of Scripture left to every Enthusiastic Visionary, or an obligation to established Doctrines, so strict as to leave no Liberty of Prophecy, are extremes equally to be avoided. But an Establishment founded on Principles, easy, rational, and comprehensive, would prevent the mischief of
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both extremes; and be most likely to produce, if not Unity of Opinion, at least Unity of affection amongst Christians. Nor can it be supposed that any impartial man, how highly soever he may think of independent Congregations, could be averse to such an Establishment, secured by some proper Test of acquiescence and conformity;* but even in this case, not extended to dominion over conscience, or persecution for opinion. Some such acknowledgement, being a sufficient proof of Ecclesiastical Allegiance, will also be a sufficient security for the peace of the Society. And it does not appear, that any man, or number of men have a right to go any farther. For it is in Ecclesiastical, as in Civil Institutions: Laws may be established for the general good; and for the general good, a Conformity and Obedience to these Laws may justly be required. But Legislators must not in either case, demand an arbitrary Jurisdiction: they ought not to enforce terms of obedience, which destroy the natural rights of Men. And in the instance under our present consideration, it does not seem strictly defensible, that any collective body shall say, We agree to receive the Scripture in such or such a signification; and except you will profess yourself to be of our opinion, we exclude you from our Society. For there are antecedent obligations both on the Governors, and those who are to be governed; obligations from a higher authority, than that of man; obligations which cannot be superseded by any power of man; first, carefully to examine and see that the sense required, is really the true one; is really consonant to the plain and indisputable Doctrine of Scripture, and defensible by the principles of reason. Besides, as Opinions must sometimes be changed as Knowledge is advanced by application; and after all, as every one must be saved by the rectitude of his conscience, that is, by acting according to his own opinion, not that of another;

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* See note (b) at the end.

it seems reasonable, that the Test should be confined to Acquiescence and Conformity, not extended to Opinion; because this implies that sort of Dominion over Conscience, which is not allowed to Man.

Such an Establishment, as is here described, carries not in it any idea of shutting the Doors of Heaven against those who are desirous to go in. If the Gate of Life, as is said, be straight, yet it is God who built it; and if the Path of it be narrow, yet it is of his appointment, whose dispensations are all merciful. And there is therefore no doubt, but they who profess Christ under the mode of Independent Societies, will, if they follow the direction of the Scriptures, find their way to Heaven; as well as they, who are more closely connected by the Form of an Establishment. But whether the harmony of this Life, and the general peace of Society, be equally promoted in both these situations, is a Question, which now I do not enter into. But upon the whole, it seems a Consummation, devoutly to be wished, that all who call themselves Christians, were associated under a rational, a comprehensive, a charitable Establishment; that there might be only one Fold, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

May therefore the Form of Episcopal Government for ever remain. May every decent dignity, void of Superstition, and every Rite of proper significance be for ever supported. May the Teachers of the Gospel, be bound by the strongest obligation to the use of a regular Liturgy. May also the Profession of the true Faith, be secured by a proper Test; but may the only Criterion of Truth, be the calm appeal of Reason to the Word of God. To bring about this happy state of things, all I plead for, is an honest and candid enquiry into the circumstances of our Ecclesiastical Polity. That we may after a fair Scrutiny, firmly retain what is right, and reject that only,
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which is amiss: that we may properly prove all things, and hold fast that alone which is good.

In many things we are undoubtedly right: perhaps in more, than is sometimes imagined. But we are frequently told, that in many things also we are certainly wrong. Objections are made, both by the Enemies, and the Friends of the Gospel. The former indeed, charge us in the severest terms: but as they generally proceed, either on an entire Ignorance, or a false view of the question debated, they have on many important articles been very fully answered. The latter say, that we have admitted, and still insist on some things, that are not consistent with the fundamental principles of Protestants: That by maintaining as Essentials, Points that are indefensible, we give great opportunity to our adversaries to blaspheme. For that they seeing us zealously contend, not so much for the Faith first delivered to the Saints, as for the vain decisions of the Schools; not so much for a rational obedience to the word of God, as an implicit submission to human decrees; are led to a conclusion, very prejudicial to the cause of the Gospel. Since from particular instances, they derive a general Inference; and condemn the whole System of Christianity, as a Scheme of Imposture; because some of its injudicious advocates consciously maintain what they know to be indefensible. That thus we not only administer cause of offence to our Enemies, but to those who are inclined to be our friends. For that many persons being displeased with these needless additions, look upon that Religion with disgust, which otherwise they would receive with admiration and gratitude. These things I do not assert; but these things are openly said; and if said truly, it is indeed a heavy accusation: nor can this affair be set right, but by a proper Enquiry.

Let me therefore wish, that a free Examination were permitted;

mitted; that every serious proposal for the advancement of Christian Knowledge, might be attended to with Impartiality; and that the idea of a Rational Religion, might no longer be subjected to the scorn and insolent ridicule of the Calumniator. For a Rational Religion is best suited to a Rational Creature; and that which can be accounted for, to Agents who are accountable. Nor does the Christian Institution in the religious part of it, any more than in the moral, disdain to be called a Reasonable service. And as the great Father of Heaven hath sometimes permitted useful discoveries to be made by persons of inferior abilities, having concealed these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto Babes; for this reason, all modest endeavours in the cause of Truth ought to be received with Candour; not treated with contempt, not encountered with violence, not suppressed by Persecution; since neither the Contemner, the Bigot, nor the Persecutor, without due examination, can be sure they do not oppose the dispensation of God.

And should it happen, that by means of farther researches, some *received opinions*, nay, even some *supposed Demonstrations* can be no longer defended; no hurt, but much good must follow. For Truth cannot be injured by the severest, if it be an honest Examination; but will come forth from its trial, certainly unimpaired, and with the appearance of additional Purity. For being of a Nature absolutely immutable, Truth cannot be affected by change of Time or Place, by alteration of Customs or Opinions, by Decisions or Decrees of Human Contrivance. All these things are of limited Power, and of transient Duration. But Truth is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Like the glorious Luminary that enlivens Nature, it is in itself ever the same, though not always equally perceived by us. And although some adventitious impurities may

may for a time obstruct the brilliancy of its beams, yet these are but the Morning Mists of Ignorance and Error; and when chased away, the Sun himself will go forth again in his Might, and shine with Meridian Brightness.

Never therefore let it be said, that we fear a trial; never let it be insinuated, that, having screened Falsehood behind the works of Establishment, we decline a fair and open contest. If what we maintain be true, we have sufficient abilities to defend the Truth. If any thing be false or indefensible, let it be generously given up; let us convince our Censurers, that we do not deserve their reflections; let us retrieve our honour by prudence, and vindicate it by a timely Reformation, where-soever it is wanted. For, to continue in known Error, is sure disgrace: while the resignation of a false, though favourite opinion, is the true mark of an ingenuous disposition; of that state of mind, best calculated for the Reception of the Doctrines of Christ.

Our Saviour commands us to search the Scriptures; that we may be certain our opinions are right. St. Paul condemns the Christians of Thessalonica for neglecting, and highly commends the Bereans for observing this conduct. We, so far as we adhere to this rule, observe the commands of our Saviour, the voice of reason, and the common Rights of Humanity. But whenever we deviate from it, we must prefer the vain traditions of men to the Infallible word of God. And in proportion as we do this, are we guilty of the fundamental fault of the Jews; exposing ourselves to the hazard of that Rejection, which in their case, we know, and, if our own, shall experience, to end in accumulated misery.

For we plainly see by all God's dealings, that peculiar dispensations of Favour do not exempt from Judgment. Reason tells us too, that Ingratitude for uncommon benefits deserves

uncommon Punishment; and our Saviour teaches us, that the servant who knows most perfectly his master's will, and neglects to do it, will be *beaten with many stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*

Let us then seriously apply to ourselves St. Paul's well-known allusion to the Natural and Wild Olive. The Jews were the Natural Branches; but for preferring the Traditions of Men to the Ordinances of God, were broken off: and we, a wild Olive, were grafted into the Original Stock. * " But let us not presume, that this was merely that we might be grafted in. Or if we do, let us consider, upon what foot things are now placed. They who are broken off, are in those unhappy circumstances, for not properly improving the grace of God: and we can maintain our present station in God's Church, only by Faith and Obedience, and a persevering progress towards perfection."

Let us then not be high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare us, if we be not careful to make a right use of his Goodness, and a constant improvement of the Talents committed to our care.

Obedience to Human Traditions, or Systematical Confessions, merely as such, will never be a permanent security, but may deceive us into Ruin.

As a proof of this, let us look upon the present State of Asia, of Africa, and of Rome: Once blessed with the purest light of the Gospel; but, preferring human to Divine Wisdom, now sunk in the darkest superstitions, and being, as it were, without God in the world.

Let us be warned by these Examples; lest God should *finish his account* with us also, *and cut it short in righteousness.* Let us for ever hold his word most sacred and authoritative: let us

* This passage, I believe, is from some Author I have read; but I cannot recollect where.

us never in any instance prefer to it the vain Figments of un-
found Philosophy, or those Traditions of Men that are not
well supported by the Scripture.

Thus shall we adorn the Doctrines of our Saviour in all
things: and when our last account shall be finally determined,
may we all receive from our great Master, this full approbation
of our Conduct, *Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, en-
ter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.*

NOTES referred to in the foregoing Sermon.

Note (a) p. 8. It may not be improper to subjoin here a short account of this
celebrated Institution. Alexander, on his return from his well-known expedi-
tion to the Temple of Jupiter Ammon, built the city of Alexandria; which he
peopled with colonies from different parts. So that his new city was inhabited,
not only by disciples of the various Philosophical Sects, but by many also of the
Jewish Religion. (See Q. Curt. L. 4. c. 28. — Joseph. cont. Ap. L. 2. & de Bell.
Jud. L. 2.) To all these he gave not only liberty to profess, and propagate
their own particular opinions, but also invested them with great and beneficial
Privileges.

Alexandria was so conveniently situated for Commerce, that this circumstance
drew to it great numbers of inhabitants from all countries; and it soon became
one of the first cities of the world. The successors of Alexander in this part of
his Empire, were encouragers of Learning and learned Men; particularly Pto-
lemy Philadelphus, who not only founded the noblest library recorded in history;
but gave so generous a protection to literature, that this city was as much famed
for being the resort of Philosophers, as it was for its riches and external mag-
nificence.

From these circumstances we may easily conjecture, what must be the state of
Learning, Theological and Philosophical, in this renowned city. The ancient
Ægyptian Theology had already undergone many changes: and having in for-
mer times supplied many countries with the materials of superstition, had also
in its turn, on various occasions, received the same sort of materials from them.
This was a species of religious traffick, which might very easily be carried on,
as the commodities exchanged, were on all sides of equal value. But when the
Persians made an establishment in Ægypt, before the time of Alexander, there
was then an extraordinary importation of new goods, with which the Ægyptians
were but little acquainted; but which were well suited to their weak and credu-
lous turn of mind; for no nation was so blindly devoted to Superstition.

So that in Alexandria was to be found a confused Chaos of all the Religious
and Philosophical Opinions then existing in the world. With the Persians came
in the Oriental Philosophy, both Indian and Persian; which in after times made
a figure

a figure amongst the Christians, under the management of Valentinus, and those who in imitation of the Eastern Magi, affected the name of Gnostics. By the liberality of Alexander, Professors of the various sects, both of Greek and Italic extraction, were established there: which sects, having before new-modelled their own barbarous notions by the Ægyptian system, did now repay in kind; and brought back to this mother-country of superstition, the subtle refinements and romantic speculations of their own respective Leaders. These were all readily received and embraced by this fond Parent. To these acquisitions must be added also, the new source of Religion and Philosophy from the Judaic Opinions; which were now well known, from the great number of Jews settled at Alexandria; and by means of the Translation of their books into the Greek Language, then very generally understood.

But what god shall now arise to form a new world out of this Philosophical Chaos! Such a daring spirit did appear at Alexandria, and his name was Potamo. Concerning the precise time of this man's birth and death, different accounts have been given by learned men. In Dufresnoy's Chronological Tables, he stands back as far as Ptolomy Philadelphus, 279 years before Christ. Brucker's account of him, does not agree with the place allotted to him in Dr. Priestley's Biographical Chart; the latter, making him cotemporary with our Saviour; the former, bringing him nearer to the time of Ammonius Saccas. Other Chronologers have varied from these, and many are in doubt and uncertainty. Diogenes Laertius, who wrote towards the end of the second Century, gives an account of him; which shews, that he taught before the time of Laertius, but not at a great distance from him: and consequently, it places him between Ammonius and our Saviour. But these differences are not of great Consequence. Probably there may have been several learned men of this name, which may have occasioned this variety of opinions. I would therefore take the middle road, as being generally nearest the truth; and place him about the time of our Saviour, upon the authority of Priestley, and of Suidas, who says that he lived in the Augustine Age.

His plan had an air of great plausibility. He had observed, that the different Philosophers, all professed to teach the Truth; which they asserted to be contained, each in his own peculiar-System. But it was evident to the common sense of mankind, that this could not be true with respect to them all; because they stood in contradiction to each other. However, except the Pyrrhonists, they all readily agreed, that there was such a thing as Truth, if she could be found. Each sect indeed pretended to possess her; but this was peremptorily denied by all the rest.

Potamo therefore, supposing that there might be both Truth and Falshood in these different systems of Philosophy, proposed to select from each, what he thought proper, and form a new system from these contradictory materials; which puts me in mind of the Imaginary Figure in the Art of Poetry.

*Humano capiti cervicem Pictor equinam
Jungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas,
Undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
Desinat in piscem Mulier formosa superne;*

Spec-

*Spectatum admissi risum teneatis Amici?
Credite, Pisones, isti tabulæ fore Librum
Persimilem, cujus, velut ægri somnia, vanæ
Fingentur species ; ut nec pes, nec caput uni
Reddatur formæ. —*

And Potamo's system of Philosophy, would be just as good a representation of Truth, as this Horatian Tablet of the human Form.

It does not appear, that he had any great success in his attempt: and indeed it could not reasonably be expected, from an endeavour to reconcile the Flights of Plato with the close method of Aristotle, or the severe doctrines of Zeno with the more urbane precepts of Epicurus. Especially, as the fundamental principles of these men were not more nearly allied, than their manner of Life, or mode of teaching.

This very plan (plausible, but improbable; begun, but not finished by Potamo) was, at the end of the second and beginning of the third Century, prosecuted with great vigour and abilities by Ammonius Saccas; a man of genius, and of learning; a man, to whom perhaps we shall not do Injustice, by saying he was an Apostate from Christ. Mr. Bayle seems of a different opinion; but however that may be, his reconciling Schemes have undoubtedly done irreparable mischief to the Cause of genuine Christianity.

Ammonius was of Alexandria, born of Christian Parents, and educated in the catechetical School established in that celebrated city. But having a strong Bent to Philosophical Enquiries, he could not avoid falling into the Eclectic method, which had been set on foot by Potamo; and was now encouraged by those men of learning, who promoted an impartial enquiry after Truth. (See Brucker de Sect. Eclectica, § 6.) This new Philosophy had recommended itself to those, who were influenced by ingenuousness more than an inflexible attachment to system; and who were now heartily sick of the Arrogance, the Contradiction, and continual Contention of the Sectarian Philosophers.

A man of abilities therefore, who set out upon this plausible plan of throwing aside all prejudice and attachment to Party, and professed to follow Truth alone whithersoever she should lead him, was sure to engage and retain a great number of disciples. (See Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. of Learning and Philosophy in Century 2.

This was the case with respect to Ammonius; whose Christian Education had not been of such sort, as to deter him from, but rather lead him to this mode of Philosophising. For in that age the great Masters, even of the Christian School at Alexandria, as Athenagoras, Pantæus, and Clemens, unfortunately admitted this Method of Instruction in their Lectures of Christianity. — Ammonius non potuit non animum ad eclecticam philosophandi rationem intendere; cum qui istâ ætate hanc scholam moderabantur doctores, Athenagoras, Pantæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, eodem fere modo et inclinatione sacris doctrinis philosophiam jungerent. (I cannot recollect where I have read this passage.)

But although these new Philosophers of Alexandria pretended a freedom from prejudice in favour of any Sectarian system; yet it may be proved very evidently, that notwithstanding this profession, they had a strong attachment to the Subli-
mities

mities of Plato, and to his opinions concerning the Deity and the Nature of Man. (See Mosheim as above: also Brucker of that age.)

Ammonius was a bold and adventurous man: He maintained, that the fundamental principles of Religion and Philosophy were to be found equally in all Sects and Professions, by a proper explanation of their respective tenets. And therefore on this absurd position, which, as he represented it, still bore an air of Candour and Plausibility; did he attempt to reconcile, not only the contradictory Philosophical Opinions; but also to mingle them with those doctrines, which he had learned in the Christian School. "The tenets of the Philosophers, the superstitions of the Heathen Priests, the solemn Doctrines of Christianity, were all to suffer in the cause; and forced Allegories were to be subtly employed in removing the difficulties, with which his scheme was attended." (See Mosh. as above.)

This was the method pursued by Ammonius with respect to the doctrines he delivered; to which he also added a plan of Life and Conduct, not less extraordinary than his doctrine. Under pretence of enjoying their philosophic meditations without interruption, he recommended to his followers a solitary and severe Retirement. This part of his plan gave occasion in after times to the Monkish Institutions; in which great numbers of men and women have passed a lazy and a worthless life, neither agreeable to the Commands of God, nor honourable to themselves, but very prejudicial to civilized Society. (See Mosh. as above.)

Ammonius, however, obtained the highest reputation; and his School was crowded with disciples, while those of the other Philosophers were in a manner deserted. We may conclude this from the conduct of Plotinus; who having heard and rejected all the other Professors who taught in Alexandria, at last attended only the Lectures of Ammonius. — Plotino, post auditos et rejectos omnes qui Alexandria docebant Professores, solus placuerit Ammonius; ejusque Schola tanta cepit incrementa, quanta nulla ferè alia. (Brucker.)

Ammonius had many celebrated disciples; amongst whom were Longinus, Herennius, and Plotinus, who was more famed than any of the rest for his Genius and Erudition. Plotinus set out on a new plan, pretending ignorance of his own birth and descent. For truly he thought it an Indignity to recollect that day, on which his soul detruded from her celestial state and enjoyments; was cast into these inferior regions, confined in the prison of the body, and made subject to Error and the Infirmities of Passion. (See Brucker de Sect. Eclect. in Plot. vit. § 11.)

In this scheme of Plotinus, are plainly to be traced the vestiges of ancient Platonism, with an absurd mixture of the Pythagorean Doctrine of Preexistence and Transmigration. However ingenious, however learned this man might be; yet it is very certain, that whoever was desirous of attaining Truth, could never gain his end by following the instructions of a Præceptor, so full of prejudice and affectation as Plotinus. Frequent Ecstasies and Celestial Visions, were among the various arts he made use of to deceive his followers; and from many instances recorded of him, he cannot be considered as any other than a subtle, an enthusiastic, and in his flighty fits of enthusiasm, almost a delirious Impostor. (See Mosheim; also Brucker.)

After Plotinus came Amelius, and the celebrated Porphyry; a man well known

known for his bitter enmity against the Christian Profession. But justice is due to an enemy: and Porphyry has the suffrage of his own and succeeding ages, for great extent of natural abilities, and equal accomplishments of learning. (See Bruck. de Porphyry.)

His disciple was Jamblichus, a man not inferior in his literary merit to his Præceptor; being of the first reputation amongst these modern Platonists. These were followed by several others of great fame; but who did not make any considerable alterations in the Doctrines taught in the Alexandrian School, and established there by the Persons above mentioned.

This Eclectic or Alexandrian Philosophy quickly spreading over the lesser Asia, was taught in the seminaries of Learning of that Country. And after Hadrian and Antonine had given encouragement to the Professors of the four principal Sects; that is, the antient Platonists, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, and Epicureans, to settle themselves once more in their original seat at Athens; the Alexandrian Philosophy also held up its head amongst them, and was taught by several celebrated Masters, as Plutarch of Athens, Syrianus, Proclus, Marianus, Isidorus, and others.

To this slight historical scetch concerning the Eclectic or Alexandrian sect, I will add one general observation concerning the consequences of their Philosophic and Theological Principles.

It is a matter beyond all rational doubt, that the evils which first corrupted Christianity, and those which remain to this day unreformed, are principally to be derived from this system. It had its rise, we see, at Alexandria in Ægypt. Now it is known, that of all people upon earth, not excepting the Athenians, the Ægyptians were most superstitious. Any thing that brought an addition to the present stock of religious ceremonies, however infantine, absurd or wicked, was greedily adopted by them. And as the learned came from all parts of the world to this country for Instruction, the Ægyptian Priests and Philosophers had a continual opportunity of inserting the vagrant Superstition of all other nations, civilized or barbarous, into their own national Establishment. And this they did not fail to do, as might be proved in many instances. So that the Ægyptian Theology was by itself, as it were, a species of Eclectic Wisdom: being compounded of their own original Mythology, blended with the superstitious Customs and Opinions, both of neighbouring and of distant Countries. When therefore, Potamo and Ammonius, and the great men who succeeded them, endeavoured to temper and anneal this Mass of Incoherencies with the contradictory principles of the Sectarian Philosophy, we may easily imagine, that great must be the Confusion resulting from this Assemblage of Jarring Elements.

Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if this spurious and confused Philosophy had been for ever shut up in those Schools where it was bred, and never had been admitted within the precincts of Christianity!

But on the contrary, many disciples who attended the Christian School at Alexandria, attended also the Lectures of Ammonius and his followers. Many who professed Christianity, could not bid farewell to their Philosophy, with respect either to Faith or to External Matters: but while they called themselves Christians, affected the outward Demeanour, and even wore the Cloke of the

Philosopher. This last circumstance would not have been of any consequence, had it not implied, and indeed had it not been used as a mark or proof, that they still retained their Philosophical Principles; but under this circumstance it has been to the Christian World, of dreadful consequence indeed.

For this eclectic mode of Christianising the Philosopher, or Philosophising the Christian, was the grand foundation of all the Misery and Corruption that infested, and indeed ruined the Christian Profession. St. Paul foresaw the mischief; and was very earnest in his admonitions to beware of Philosophy, and of that Wisdom of the World by which men became ignorant of God. But all was to no purpose. The connection between Christianity and Philosophy, established by these Philosophising Christians, was unfair and inequitable to the last degree; since Philosophy had every thing to gain, and nothing to lose; Christianity every thing to lose, and nothing to gain by the Traffick. And the event was, that Philosophy was built upon the ruins of Christianity. For Brucker expressly says, *Majora adhuc momenta habuit secta et Philosophia Alexandrina, respectu ad Christianam Ecclesiam habito; cui tanta vulnera infixit, totque morbos contraxit pestilentissimos, ut non ullam ferè hæresin illi tantopere nocuisse merito dicendum sit; nihilque magis vel Evangelii cursum impediverit, vel Doctrinam puriorem corruptelis perdiderit nefandis.* (Bruck. de Sect. Eclect. § 45. P. 9.)

(b) p. 15. Since this discourse was put to the press, I have had the pleasure of reading a Pamphlet, entitled, "A Letter to a Bishop, occasioned by the late Petition to Parliament for Relief in the Matter of Subscription." The candour, good sense, and good temper of the whole, claim the highest approbation; but in particular, I am happy to find my opinion on this point confirmed by the authority of so respectable a writer; as I believe, that by *A General Approbation*, with a *Promise to comply* with the Forms prescribed, he means the same thing that I do by the terms *Acquiescence* and *Conformity*.